The Handmaid

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/22927453.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warnings:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Major Character Death, Rape/Non-Con
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Hannibal (TV), The Handmaid's Tale - Margaret Atwood
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Bedelia Du Maurier/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Bedelia Du Maurier, Jack Crawford, Freddie Lounds, Beverly Katz
Additional Tags:	Mpreg, Crossover, AU Handmaid's Tale, Secret Relationship, Hannibal Lecter Loves Will Graham, Will Graham Loves Hannibal Lecter, Depression, Running Away, Not Beta Read, Whump, Angst, Eventual Happy Ending
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2020-02-27 Updated: 2020-04-08 Words: 10,871 Chapters: 5/?

The Handmaid

by RoswellSmokingWoman

Summary

Will knew Hannibal before this time. Will was still ashamed to admit he even thought about Hannibal in such a way, a way that made his skin prickle up with goosebumps and his mind wander. He'd never done anything about it, despite the fevered glances and lingering touches they shared. Will doesn't think about these much now.

The fact is, Will is no longer Will.

Will simply is fertility, the beacon of hope and future of untainted reproduction.

Handmaid's tale AU with Handmaid!Will and Commander!Hannibal

Notes

Song: Mountains of the Moon--Bayou

Echoes of the past

Will knew Hannibal before this time. Will was still ashamed to admit he even thought about Hannibal in such a way, a way that made his skin prickle up with goosebumps and his mind wander. He'd never done anything about it, despite the fevered glances and lingering touches they shared. Will doesn't think about these much now, at least that'swhat Will would like to believe.

The fact is, Will is no longer Will.

Will simply is fertility, the beacon of hope and the future of untainted reproduction.

Will is rare. He knows it every morning when he wakes up to the sound of Martha opening the door, shuffling in with shushes and concern. Will should be up by now. He should be. But how can he wake up every morning knowing he is who he is now? A handmaid.

In the beginning, Will had a razor to trim his beard. That is no longer allowed. Not since the incident at Commander Waterford's home. Martha trims Will's beard for him in the morning, leaving only the beginnings of stubble on his face. This was Hannibal's request. . .

Commander Lecter.

Will wonders if he would have chosen Hannibal, had he been given the choice. His heart aches at the thought, heavy with the image of possibilities. Would Will have chosen Hannibal, if this was not the trajectory of his life?

Martha dresses him in red then, a simple outfit. She covers him in a red cloak and places a white winged hat on his head. She smiles at him, awkwardly. "Would you see if the butcher will trade the two chickens for a beef bottom round? We're hosting the Commanders tonight." Martha is ecstatic; the house will be buzzing, and her efforts will be praised, though not directly. She will listen to every complement, directed at the Commander's wife, anyway. Will wants to pity her, but he is beyond feeling pity. In a world drenched with pity, how could he contribute anything of substance?

He leaves the home, the sound of the door creaking closed behind him. Past the front gate, Ofjack stands with her head down, looking at her feet. She is not the same as before, Ofjack used to be taller. He wonders who he will see today, and how long she will last.

"Blessed be the fruit," she greats him, looking up for only a moment.

"May the lord open," Will responds gruffly.

They walk away from the Lector home, leaving its domineering façade in the distance. Will looks back to see the spire where his room is, the drapes drawn closed. When they are far from the homes, walking past the river, Will turns to Ofjack.

“What is your name?” he asks her, though he knows who she is. He wants to know. He needs to know if any shred of her is left, or if the Aunts had ripped that away from her too.

“Ofjack,” she giggles, “The weather is nice. We haven’t had such nice weather is so long. I hope it doesn’t rain later.”

He checks above them, above the riverwalk for guards, but sees no one. “My name is Will. What’s yours?” Will asks again.

“Your name is Ofhannibal. Don’t be silly!” She exclaims, nearly singsong.

You’re deranged. Will thinks. He sighs deeply, looking at her for a stray strand of curly red hair. It could possibly be the only remainder of fire left in her. “The weather is lovely.” Freddie, he wants to shout. Months ago, he would have reviled her. But who she is now, reduced to this? Will can’t hold contempt for her present person.

She is, after all like him—the embodiment of fertility.

That’s all they are, anymore.

****

During the dinner, the handmaids surround him. He knows he is the only male in the room. Fertile men were so rare even before, ones that could carry children to term. Will is one in thirty thousand. He wishes his uterus and ovaries had shriveled up into prunes, as his useless phallus had. They defiantly remain intact, saved for the miracle of baring a commander’s child. He was born into the unlucky class of men, the ones who could bare children but not inseminate. Hannibal was born into the other, virile and dominant over him.

Once, he had imagined his child would be Hannibal’s and his. And now their child, if they are to produce one, would be Hannibal and Bedelia’s. The thought washes over him like acid rain, burning through his skin and bones, leaving him a melted mess on the floor.

Offrederick pulls him away from his thoughts. “The full moon is nearing,” she says, looking out of Will’s barred window. Alana looks odd, in red. He used to think it suited her, but now it makes her skin look deathly pale. He wonders if that’s why, as Will overheard from Hannibal, that Chilton recoils at the thought of touching her.

Ofbrain chimes in, “That’s quite a bad thought.” A case like his, Beverly who only admired Brian from a distance before, now is forced to watch him be with another. He wishes he could claw through the brainwashing and pull her out again. He wishes he could speak to her in hushed tones about how they could escape and try to reclaim a piece of their past. That no longer exists.

“For some of us it’s good,” Will spits out. He has three more cycles before he’s put up for review—the third time. Will wonders if Hannibal will discard him and opt for a different handmaid. One that could produce a child for him. So that Will won’t have to hand his child over to Bedelia.

The others drone on, but Will filters it all out.

****

Like clockwork, on the 24th of this month, Will feels a wetness forming in his underwear. He knows he is fertile, and that this morning Martha will dress him and lead him to the Commander's bedroom for the ceremony. He feels himself growing sick, his stomach's contents rising up in his throat.

Will is still while Martha dresses him this morning, not commenting on how she sprays him with a neutral, clean smelling cologne. It's to please Hannibal, Will knows. He needn't ask her why this day is different than the others, why she rubs his temples this morning to relax him. Why she feeds him a hearty breakfast, larger than every other day of the month, and provides him with the softest pair of socks and underwear he owns on this day.

He never thinks about these details, and instead detaches himself on this day. Like a ghost, he floats over Ofhannibal and Martha, observing with tears welling in his eyes. If he could haunt this home, he would burry himself in Hannibal's office so he could shriek in it for the remainder of time. He would rip apart the medical notes and drawings Hannibal keeps there, pull apart the desk, and impale Bedelia on the antlers of the taxidermized deer head Hannibal uses to decorate the office wall. He would be a nightmare, if he could live as a spirit.

He wonders if Hannibal would at all be perturbed. Or perhaps, he would be thankful. Perhaps the part of Hannibal which looked at Will with gentle fondness, the one which stroked Will's cheek in their darkest moments, still remains. Deeply buried by the circumstance of society, past the person suit Hannibal must maintain, there is the man who Will had fallen for. Will wonders if that man would sigh in relief if this home were turned into rubble.

The ceremony happens when the clock strikes noon. Bedelia comes into the room first, a tight frown on her thin face. She sits above Will's head, taking his arms into her hands. The rouse is despicable. Bedelia has no part in this, but it is how they preserve integrity. Leave the Commanders with their handmaids, and who knows what would happen? Bedelia is here as a guard, nothing more. The disgust oozes out of her like a thick, yellow, vapid pus.

Hannibal comes in moments later, his face still and unmoving. Will searches for a glance, a sign. His eyes instead convey only a black void, lifeless and greedy. It swallows Will's up and spits out a submissive, weak creature instead. The creature lies on its back and allows itself to be used. To be violated. If it is honest, the creature loves it. The abuse. It begs for more, only for it to be left abandoned and alone.

Hannibal removes Will's pants quickly, relying on his professionalism from years of medical training. It's a cold movement, no lingering touches, no passionate caresses. Will closes his eyes, imagining.

When Hannibal places his cock into Will, he immediately feels full. He struggles to let himself slip into it, to enjoy it. He presses his lips together, to not let out a sound. It would

offend Bedelia if he were to reduce himself to an animal. Even so, the longer they stay like this, the more Will floats into his dreams of the past. There, Hannibal takes his time in touching him. Hannibal allows Will to take control, setting the pace. Will imagines their first time would have been slow. Hannibal would want to cover each crevice in kisses.

When Hannibal comes, Will opens his eyes and watches the ceiling. Bedelia and Hannibal leave him to dress himself. He knows Martha will come for him in a few moments. He touches his face, noticing the wetness of his cheeks. He hadn't realized that he was crying.

****

When the night comes, Will struggles to sleep. His bones ache, and his mind is exhausted; even so, he cannot shut off the thoughts. He wonders if he could let himself scream to wake up the home. He wishes it would wake up the home, so Bedelia could send him away to where the others are taken. He would push her down the stairs, but in such a way that he could see her live to be a broken thing.

He would gut Hannibal, as he Hannibal guts him daily. It's the lack of attention, the dismissal of the past, that cuts through Will like a sharp knife. Will wants it to cut deep enough so he won't have to feel its cut again. He is given no such mercy. He turns in his bed, sighing.

There's a soft knock on his door, the door handle jiggling as it becomes unlocked with a key. He expects it to be Martha as he sits up. He rubs his eyes, heavier now.

"Will?" Hannibal's voice calls out in a whisper, gentle.

Will thinks it's a dream, seeing Hannibal here. Calling his name. But there he stands, tangible and real. "Commander?" Will calls out.

"Please, don't," Hannibal tells him, coming over to Will's bed. "Hannibal. Call me Hannibal."

Will nods hesitantly. "Hannibal," he manages with a broken smile.

"I never believed fate would lead us down this terrible path. But we have no control over fate," Hannibal tells him. "Even so, I have to do with it what I can."

"It's been so many months Hannibal. You enjoy my suffering," Will spits at him, overcome with anger.

Hannibal takes his hands into his own, pressing a kiss on Will's knuckles. "You know, already that it's not true. You saw how I looked at you before all of this. If only I had taken my chance, then." Hannibal's voice cracks through the whispers. In the moonlight peaking through Will's window, he sees the softness of Hannibal's eyes like thick caramel. It's a look he hadn't seen in so long.

"I loved you," Will admits. "Not anymore. You've chosen this life."

“I do what I can to survive, to protect myself so that I can protect you. I’ve ensured that you’re not ripped from my care, despite Bedelia’s protests.”

“I am your concubine, and you a sultan who will behead me given the chance.” Will pulls his hands away from Hannibal’s grasp.

“You are a muse who never slips my attention. I would fall to your feet to worship you as my queen,” Hannibal utters.

“What do we have left, Hannibal?” Will asks him, breathing out slowly. The words are difficult, his mind spinning. As many times as he’d imagined this moment, he’d never been able to determine how he would react.

“Let me prove myself to you,” Hannibal offers, closing the space between their faces. “Please,” he pleads.

Hannibal is not one to plead, to beg. Even so, on his knees at the bedside, he pledges himself to Will in hopes that Will would take him. His desperation covers him like a thick blanket, and he watches Will carefully.

Will purses his lips, backing his head away at first. He needs space, room to think. He knows this wouldn’t be sustainable. It would be dangerous, for him and Hannibal. Relationships such as these were punished heavily.

He sighs, bringing his head closer to Hannibal. Hannibal puts his hand on Will’s cheek, stroking it lightly. The seconds that pass feel like an eternity. In that moment, Will forgets anything outside of his room. The remainder of the home doesn’t exist, Bedelia in the bedroom on the other side of the home no longer there. Reality melts away.

Hannibal places his lips over Will’s kissing him softly. Will gasps at the feeling of Hannibal’s lips, but falls into Hannibal a few moments later. The kiss deepens, Will feeling the tip of Hannibal’s tongue grazing over his lips.

He pulls away, watching Hannibal. “Okay,” is all Will can manage then. “Okay.”

It almost feels like a fantasy, the moonlight bathing their skin. They stay in that position, Hannibal kneeling on the floor, and Will sitting up in bed looking down at Hannibal, not speaking words. They only share tentative kisses and ghost-like touches until the sun peaks through the horizon at the break of dawn. Hannibal leaves then, unable to look at Will. He cannot say goodbye or goodnight, for it's a pause to his preferred reality. One that he must take, no matter how he wishes he could pause the rest of his life instead. His heart thuds like a somber drum.

If I close my eyes, I can pretend it's alright

Chapter Summary

Losing hope, Will thinks that Hannibal doesn't want him after days of silence. Hannibal reaches out, just as Will learns some news from Ofjack (aka Freddie Lounds.)

Chapter Notes

Song: Aurora--Runaway

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In another plane, perhaps Hannibal would have enjoyed being called Commander Lecter. It conveys a kind of importance; a high societal rung which Hannibal occupies. It should feel natural to be a leader; he should feel empowered. Not so many have been given this position. Simply because he is the type of man who gives seed, rather than takes, tied to his connections with those in positions of power—Hannibal became what he is.

A farse.

When he hears *"Commander,"* roll off of Will's tongue, it hits him like an abrasive onslaught. Guilt is not an emotion he had ever dwelled on; now it consumed him. He watches for months as Will shuffles about the home, head turned down and eyes always darting away from his gaze. It breaks Hannibal, not quickly, but slowly as a chisel chipping away pieces of his chest until his heart becomes exposed. He would falter sooner, but what gives him strength is the thought that if enough time passes Hannibal can secure a future away from this monstrous society for him and Will.

The games of their past seem foolish now. Had he been able to predict this future, he would have claimed Will as his sooner. When the sirens went off that morning, the fertile bearers of children taken, and his position as Commander granted, this much was clear to him. For the first time in his life, he had made a big mistake. He should have taken Will and run, he should have found them a safe haven, he should have tried…

Should has never been a word that Hannibal used, not for himself. Now all of his sentences are formed around the word. Apologies seem insufficient. How could he have done this to Will? He only gains solace in the knowledge that Will is with him, so that no one else may lay a finger on him—so that no one will hurt him.

He doesn’t consider Bedelia, who has taken her position as his wife, in strides. She enjoys the power, the immunity she has. Her personal beliefs malleable, she is the ideal wife for this time. She does not pity Will. She is even jealous of the moment of attention Hannibal pays him once monthly. Hannibal resents her for who she’s become, though Hannibal does not show her this. He allows her to live under the façade of their marriage.

He believes he is helping Will in all of this.

When the day comes, that fateful ceremony, Hannibal’s heart drops in the morning. He leaves it lying in the bed, beating and bleeding, because it is easier this way. His face becomes a blank slate to which he adds no coloring of emotion. He proceeds, an un-human, performing tasks robotically. Bedelia avoids him on this day, and for that he is thankful. The clock strikes noon slowly, as if time had slowed itself only for Hannibal.

The room is large, but when he walks in it is suffocating and small. He doesn’t look at Bedelia, who sits above Will’s head. He lets her escape his vision, thinking of years ago. Of the day he met Will. His awkward smile and avoidant eyes. The scent of aftershave, no doubt with a picture of a ship on the bottle. He knows Will is wearing it now; he has Martha put it on him. He hopes Will knows, through this act, what it means. What he means to him.

As he inserts his hardened member into Will, he watches as Will closes his eyes. Stifled moans escape his mouth. Hannibal can’t help but look at Will, watch for signs of pain or discomfort. He can’t bare the thought of hurting him. He increases the pace as tears begin to run from Will’s eyes. Hannibal rubs his own, moving the beginning of tears away. He mustn’t show how this affects him. He must be strong, if not for himself, but for Will.

When he cums, it’s not a relief.

It’s an anvil, crushing him.

His Will, his darling boy.

He’d done this to him—he’d destroyed him.

****

It’s risky. Hannibal knows it. But he can no longer hold back; he cannot wait for the right time to align itself with their lives. He might never get the chance to save Will. To hold him in his arms and breathe sweet words into his ear.

He leaves Will’s room, his fingers still vibrating from the feeling of Will. He hadn’t let himself do more than kiss him; he wouldn’t betray Will in this way. They should start slowly, so that Will can learn to trust Hannibal again. It will not be easy. Hannibal doesn’t care.

He imagines Will coming to him, nude. His perfect alabaster skin glowing in the dark as if Will is otherworldly, angelic. Hannibal would press kisses into his skin, giving each inch of him the love he has always deserved. It doesn't matter that they hadn't explored their feelings for each other before. He must live in the present. He would shower Will with each

missed I love. He would place each unkissed kiss on his lips. And for every time Hannibal hadn't taken Will in his arms, for every second they had not spent together, Hannibal would make up for Will. He would part an ocean in order to create a pathway for them, a way for them to live away from this life.

He sighs at his desk, taking a pen and paper into his hand.

****

Will waits for three days after that night. He doesn't see Hannibal in the home, nor does he hear a single word from him. He wonders if he had dreamt it all—it is more likely. He can still recall the brush of Hannibal's lips against his own. It would be more likely if it were a dream.

On the third day, he tells Martha he isn't feeling well. She allows him several more hours to sleep and lay in bed, though she shouldn't. Neither the Commander nor his wife are home, so she can get away with it. Will lays motionless in the bed, staring at the ceiling as if it's a white screen to which he can project his fantasies upon.

Of Hannibal returning again,

Scooping him up into his strong arms,

And whisking him away from this bedroom,

Away from this home,

Off into whatever other world they can be in.

Will reaches underneath his pillow then and feels the corner of an envelope beneath his fingertips. He bites his tongue in shock, pulling it out immediately. Knowing who it is from, he rips open the envelope and removes the paper from it.

Come to my study tonight when it's safe.

He hadn't imagined that night.

****

Ofjack waits for him at the gate, her head down. Ofhannibal is late, later than he should be. Even so, she still waits for him because she must. She grasps the basket in her hands tightly, its basketweave imprinting into her soft palms.

The gate finally creaks open, Will coming out slowly. She sighs in relief. "Blessed be the fruit," she greets.

"May the lord open," he grumbles.

They walk in silence, no small talk and no mention of the weather. She walks quicker than usual, leading Will to the riverwalk by the bridge. It is safer there, with fewer

guards. Halfway to the grocery store, Freddie opens her mouth.

"My name is Freddie Lounds," she states firmly.

Will is silent for a moment, stopping. He turns to her to peer beneath her white winged hat, noticing the telling glint in her eyes. "Ofjack is nicer," Will responds, laughing.

"I have no Tattle Crime to write, not any longer. Either way." Freddie keeps walking, allowing Will to catch up before quickening her pace.

Will feels as if he should trust her; despite their differences, Freddie is clever. He wonders why she'd waited until now to reveal herself to him. "So…" Will begins, leading nowhere.

"So." Freddie inhales. "We have a window of two hours tonight. There's a group; they want to help us. We can leave. They'll take us up north, to Canada. Away from Gilead."

Will's heartbeat quickens, thinking. He doesn't know how to respond; he would run if he could. This is the chance. He might not have another.

Hannibal.

It would mean leaving behind Hannibal.

Freddie hands him a crumbled pink slip. "Whoever can manage will meet us at this spot during that time. Memorize it. Burn the paper. You don't need to give me an answer now."

Will doesn't breathe a single word for the remainder of their trip.

****

"Can you come in here for a moment?" Bedelia calls to Will.

It is strange; Bedelia is not one to ask for Will. Will comes into the room, adjusting his read clothing. He's thankful that inside he doesn't have to wear the white winged hat. He's thankful that he doesn't need to hide his grimace from Bedelia.

"Could you take this corner?" Bedelia asks as she hands him a salmon colored bedsheet.

Will stares at it, knowing it was him who lied on it as Hannibal thrusted into him. He nods and helps her fold. It should be Martha who is doing this. It normally is her job, but Will knows this is Bedelia's way of communicating. Instead of a slap, she presents him this. It stings worse.

He continues to help her fold, and she watches him carefully. "I've spoken to Martha about your diet. We're going to change it a bit; perhaps it will help…" She sighs, looking away from him.

Bedelia wants a baby. She cannot have one of her own. So, she will use Will as an incubator instead. Will wants to spit on her. All he can manage to say is, “Thank you.”

He should be fat with Hannibal’s child by now. He’s been in their home longer than other handmaids stay with their Commanders. Hannibal refuses to give him up; Bedelia knows that Hannibal cannot let him go—at least Will thinks Bedelia knows that Hannibal is fond of him because of their past. Even so, she makes no mention of it to Hannibal. She is in no position to deny him. But if it should be that way, then Will would provide them with a child. He would do his duty.

“Do you feel..?” Bedelia begins, picking off blonde hair from a blanket.

“It’s too early to tell,” Will manages. “Do you need any other help?”

“That will be all.” She sighs as she watches him walk away, jealous of what he has—something that she had lost. She places a hand on her barren abdomen, closing her eyes. Tears don’t come, even her tear ducts no longer fertile. Her face contorts, regardless, a pitiful and dry cry.

****

Will stares at the crumbled pink slip of paper in his hands, brushing his thumb over its ridges. As the time approaches, the home grows quiet. In only an hour, Hannibal would be waiting for Will in his office. It’s the time when everyone else is in bed—Will had learned this early on. He had never used this to his advantage before.

Will planned the escape from his bedroom meticulously, having broken the locking mechanism earlier in the day. He would climb down the stairs, shoes off. He would go to the coat rack and place Hannibal’s coat on himself, which would hide his red clothing in the night.

Had he chosen to run away?

Even now, Will doesn’t know the answer to that question. He doesn’t know if he can trust Hannibal, who had let Will fall apart for months in this home. It’s as if Hannibal had bought a house plant and stuck it in a corner, never watering it nor allowing it sunlight. Will is abused and wilting. His heart twists in agony, though, as he thinks about running.

Hannibal had come to him, just as he had begun to lose hope. He rubs a hand over his stomach, still flat but bursting with hope. What if the last Ceremony had produced a child? What if Will is to run away, pregnant with a product of him and Hannibal? He imagines a child, with chubby cheeks and pink lips. He imagines a girl with brown eyes and sandy hair, the beginnings of curls sprouting from her head. She would be beautiful. Perfect.

Will doesn’t know how the time passes, finding that an hour had melted away. He stands to grip the door handle, twisting.

Chapter End Notes

Soooo... This is going to be longer than 3 chapters. I don't know how long I will make it. I'm just so taken with this Handmaid's Tale AU.

Soft skin under terrified fingertips

Chapter Summary

Will faces a choice: Does he run away or stay with Hannibal?

Chapter Notes

Song: Novo Amor-Anchor

His feet glide down the stairs, his heart racing. Will isn't quite sure what path he'll take, but his eyes remain steady on the door. If he leaves, he will have a kind of freedom that he hasn't had in so very long, nearly a year now, together with the training and his time as a handmaid. He would be able to walk normally on the streets, wearing any color he chooses. He would be able to speak, really speak, and not have someone poke at his tongue with a cattle prod for any unacceptable, unsavory thought. And Will's mind is filled with so very many of these little taboo morsels. The adrenaline courses through his veins like fire, his feet picking up the pace. The door is an archway into another realm he so desperately wants to enter. He's almost there, his hand on the door handle.

"Hannibal," his mind mewls out, softly in an almost plea.

His hand no longer has the strength to grip the door handle, and so it drops to his side. He inhales. He exhales. Static fills his mind, the volume turned up so high that it's nearly deafening. He knows he cannot leave through that door. The bedroom was easy enough. But the house?

He can't leave Hannibal behind.

It feels wrong.

It feels. . . lonely.

He boils with an anger for himself, almost self-loathing, for his inability to run away. He so desperately craves normalcy. Hannibal could offer that to him, on the slightest off chance that they could escape together. But this—this is more likely, Will thinks. Freddie is clever, smart. She knows how to slither through cracks as a snake, after all she had been a tabloid reporter before the creation of Gilead. She would be able to get them out, away from here. But Will knows, he wouldn't want a life without Hannibal. It would be empty, devoid of the love he knows he needs from the sole person which could provide him with it.

He turns away from the door, leaving it behind like an abandoned child, and carefully tiptoes to Hannibal's office room. The home seems larger than ever now, its wooden parquet abrasive, the cream walls suffocating, and the lavish furnishings daunting. The hallway seems to extend before him infinitely stretching into another plane, unobtainable. He no longer sees the office door.

Several blinks later, without breathing, Will finds himself in front of the door, the remainder of the home filtered out. The static in his head has died down. The office door, however, is larger than life, expanding as if he's fallen down the rabbit hole. He knocks on it hesitantly, his knuckles tapping on its thick and hard mahogany wood.

Silence greets him, for a time. Then, the sound of a chair scraping the floor. Footsteps, light and determined. The doorknob turns with a slight squeak, and the door opens only a crack, Hannibal's caramel eye peering out of it.

"Will?"

Will nods, gasping. "Hannibal."

Hannibal moves away from the door, letting Will come inside of his office. Will had never been in this part of the home before, and he'd always wondered how Hannibal would decorate it. It's quite similar to Hannibal's old psychiatry office, though smaller, and without the chairs in the middle. Bookshelves line the right wall, Hannibal's large desk in the middle of the room. The walls are a blood red, and it appears as if they're almost bleeding. He feels Hannibal in them, suffering.

"I don't know what to do," Will stammers out.

"Allow me?" Hannibal leans forward, placing a kiss on Will's lips. It's tentative at first, his lips barely brushing over Will's. He allows Will time to react, to process. Will leans in only when Hannibal is about to leave his lips cold, uncovered by his own. The kiss grows into pure hunger, as if Will had been starving since their last meeting. He moans into Hannibal as Hannibal buries his hands into Will's hair.

Will is tempting, he cannot deny it. And yet, Hannibal stops himself from taking the kiss further. He pulls away from Will, staring into those fragile blue eyes, searching. He sees himself reflected, a desperate man.

"I started to think that you wouldn't come," Hannibal breathes, pulling Will into his chest. "It isn't like you to be late."

"You don't appreciate lateness. It's rude."

"Things change," Hannibal exhales.

"Do you?" Will nearly spits. He doesn't expect the anger to bubble to the forefront of his mind, and yet here it is.

“I’ve only learned from my mistakes, which is the most I can hope for. I… find myself reflective as of late. Thinking of the past, often.”

“What do you glean from it?”

“Missed chances among many happy memories, like a graveyard for opportunity.” Hannibal presses a kiss into Will’s forehead tenderly. “I don’t want to make you stand. Come, sit.”

Hannibal guides them to his couch, black velvet and soft beneath them. He allows Will to place whatever space he wishes to between them, though Will doesn’t give them space. Hannibal is glad for this, that Will isn’t so hurt by Hannibal’s shortcomings. Will decides to give Hannibal a chance, to see if he is honest. Will aches for Hannibal to be honest. He doesn’t want this to be a manipulation, like one of the many he’s played in years prior.

“Not many of our memories our happy,” Will admits to him.

“Perspective differs greatly from person to person. I am, I was, the Chesapeake Ripper. Does that sit poorly in you, still?”

Will shakes his head, no, leaning forward with a sigh. “I wonder why you don’t execute the rude, now. That sits with me poorly.”

“Social pressures are difficult to navigate. I need to maintain my standing. There are eyes everywhere.”

“So you are what? An owl perched in its tree waiting to dive in for the prey.”

“In a way, you aren’t wrong.”

“And in a way, I am.”

“Should an opportunity present itself—”

“You would take the chance. And what if it never does? Would you have me be your handmaid until my womb dries up and you’re forced to give me away?” Will wants to yell, to shout at him, but he knows they must speak in hushed voices.

“I could never give you away. You’re mine. Not as a belonging, no. You are my person, perhaps the only one. Do you understand?”

“Are we to meet in secret, then? For how long? Until they find us out?”

Hannibal grabs Will’s hands, pressing his lips over them with butterfly kisses. “I lived for decades avoiding suspicion.”

“You think you can hide us?”

“Until we can leave, yes.”

“When they came, we were talking about escaping Baltimore. Do you remember?”

“You claimed to have killed Freddie Lounds. The betrayal wafted off of you thickly. Did you know that I could smell her on you?”

Will sighs in defeat. “I wanted you to. To know that I hadn’t chosen a side. I went home. They were waiting for me there. It’s where I was captured… and then sent to the Aunts for training. And you avoided capture, because the United States crumbled. How lucky for you.”

“The other commanders are wary of me holding this position. Jack vocally opposes it. He can’t do anything.”

“You see why we need to leave, then,” Will concludes.

Hannibal nods. “Would you have run away with me, if it hadn’t ended up this way? I’ve always wondered.”

“Yes. In the end, I would have. That’s what I wanted, more than revenge or reckoning. I want you.” Tears begin to spill from Will’s eyes.

Hannibal pulls him into his shoulder, holding him tightly. He begins whispering to Will in Lithuanian then, promises and words of love. He knows Will would never understand, but he doesn’t want Will to hear these words now. He cannot make promises to Will he doesn’t know he will be able to keep. And so he goes on, speaking to him in a language he doesn’t understand, but hoping that the emotion which fills the words is sensed by Will anyway.

They don’t know how it begins, how he they allow themselves to spill out for each other, their hearts laid bare. They find themselves without their clothes, naked in front of each other. It is different now, Hannibal able to touch Will and Will able to touch Hannibal. Their hands tremble as they feel each other, soft skin under terrified fingertips.

Hannibal never intended for this—for them to make love to each other immediately. But neither of the men can stop themselves. The kisses are too deep. The touches are too maddening. They grasp for each other, lost in at sea in this new regime, Hannibal a life raft for Will and Will for Hannibal. Will’s sweat tastes of desperation as Hannibal presses a kiss into Will’s neck, biting down, careful to not leave a bruise. In another time, he would mark Will thoroughly. He would announce to the world that Will is his.

It is different now, for Will. He can feel Hannibal’s every emotion bore into his skin, and this alone is nearly enough to drive Will to orgasm. The feel of Hannibal’s thick member entering him is intense. He is welcoming to it, wet and wanton. He moans at the feeling of it. He closes his eyes, unable to look at Hannibal. He focuses on the sensation, wild.

“Please look at me, my darling.” Hannibal pleads. “I want to see you.”

Will opens his eyes, petrified by what Hannibal’s would contain. So many times, they were barren black holes. Now, they are boiling over with emotion, wet with the

beginnings of tears. “Hannibal,” Will moans as he feels himself edging over the brink.

“Yes, love, cum for me.”

****

The dawn light peaks through the blinds of Hannibal’s study, Hannibal shifting under Will who is asleep in his chest. He would never move from this place, if he wouldn’t have to. He can believe that their perfect world lay here, in his office. A place where he can hold onto Will, a place with no time. He knows this isn’t true—that he would have to wake Will from his sleep and they would have to say goodbye, for a time, until their next meeting.

The phone rings on Hannibal’s desk, waking Will. He groans out, sitting up from Hannibal. “Why?” he asks, to no one—or perhaps a non-existent God.

“I have to get the phone. I don’t want this—” Hannibal inhales deeply. “You will have to return to your room.”

“I know. I know.” Will reaches for his clothes under the couch. “Go on, get the phone.”

Hannibal stands from the couch, leaving Will who he knows is shattering. He can feel it in the air. He picks up the phone, anyway. “Hello. Yes, this is Commander Lecter.”

A pause, long.

“Yes, my handmaid is here. I can have Martha check. This is absurd. I’m sure he hasn’t run off.”

Another pause, this time shorter.

“Yes, I will alert Martha right away. This is most unexpected. Goodbye.”

Will stares at Hannibal, unmoving. His legs feel like bricks, growing heavier with each passing second. Hannibal’s face is unmoving at first, a statue. His face contorts slowly, softening and his upper lip trembling. “You were late because you planned on running away,” he states.

“Is anyone hurt?”

“Freddie Lounds is missing.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“You wanted to run away.”

“I didn’t. I couldn’t. I came here. I couldn’t leave you.” Will takes a step toward Hannibal.

“I know. You could’ve been free. You chose this instead.”

“Is Freddie Lounds free?”

“It will only be harder for us, now. If she is. You need to get dressed immediately.”

“What does this mean for us, Hannibal?”

Hannibal doesn’t respond, and instead walks toward the shirt at Will’s feet. He picks it up and places it over Will’s head, dressing him. He places a hand on Wills’ cheek, stroking it delicately. “I will send you a note, soon.”

Will nods, leaving the room without a word.

The moodiness is a good indication

Chapter Summary

After the disappearance of Freddie Lounds, Hannibal leaves Will with only his thoughts and perhaps a little something else.

Chapter Notes

Jome--Brushstroke

Over a month passes without word from Hannibal. The days begin to blur, the longer Will goes without hearing from him. Most mornings, he wishes he would never have to move from bed. Freddie Lounds, Ofjack, is nowhere to be found. He distinctly remembers Hannibal telling Will this would be problematic for them, the look of heartbreak filling his eyes. If this will be all they would ever have together, Will would always cherish it. But he would always wish for more—more a bittersweet word on the tip of his tongue, timid but aching to get out.

That morning, Martha looks at him anxiously, watching him take every bite of his food. She's almost upset that he's eating—and he can't quite figure out why. He puts his fork down against his plate, the clang of it ringing in his ears.

"What seems to be the problem?" he spits at her, teeth clenched together.

"You mustn't speak to me that way!" Martha gasps, rubbing her hands together. "I just—I haven't noticed a bout of morning sickness…"

Ah, yes—the particular predicament male carriers of children experience. They have no menses, no indication that they are baring a child other than the swelling of the abdomen along with the other symptoms normally associating with pregnancy. Without taking a test, Will wouldn't know either—not until his red pants begin to fit a bit tighter around the waist. He hadn't given it much thought, not for the past few weeks even.

"I suppose today's schedule involves me going for a checkup."

Martha sighs, turning towards the pile of dirty dishes in the sink waiting for her. "At least the moodiness is a good indication."

Will clenches the fork tightly in his hand, forcing himself to finish the meal. There would be punishment if he left so much as a crumb on his plate. It would seem to them, to Bedelia especially, a kind of rejection of his *gift*. As if it weren't really a rejection of them, of her, of this ill formed societal institution. He swallows the watery scrambled eggs in disgust, their slime sticking to the back of his throat. This isn't morning sickness, he shouts at himself in his mind, as he turns toward the kitchen trash bin to empty the contents of his stomach. *Absolutely vile.*

Martha rushes to his side, brushing away the longer locks of hair from his face. She strokes circles into his back until the contents of his stomach have fully transferred into the bin. When he turns, he pauses, a shaky breath leaving his lips. He dislikes the smug smile spread on Martha's face.

"Happy, aren't we?" he grimaces.

****

The doctor's office is cold and grey. There are botanical pictures hanging from the walls, but it all sits wrongly in him. This is not a safe space. This is a cage that he should claw out of until his fingertips are worn down to bloody stubs, chucks of flesh imbedded into the wall. He clenches his fingertips, feeling their stiffness. With a groan, in spite of the unease settling in his bones, he pulls on the papery white gown with a sense of distaste. He readies himself, plopping his ass onto the doctor's table.

In this moment, alone, he brushes his hand over his abdomen, imagining what it would feel like if it were rounder, plumper, teaming with the life of a child. He dares not to call it *his* child. No, it would be Bedelia and Hannibal's child. He's almost certain of this fact, since Hannibal had not called on him for over a month. He doesn't let the tears run from his eyes now, though he could blame them on some imaginary hormones that he's not quite sure exist. And what if they do, could he blame his tears on them, later?

A knock at the door, a misleading attempt of professionalism and insurance of—privacy? When the doctors cold hands invade his crevices, where would the privacy be then?

Will clears his throat, "Yes, I'm ready."

The door opens slowly, a brown leather shoe stepping over the threshold. "Hello, uh," the doctor checks his chart, "Ofhannibal. Hoping for some good news, today?"

He nods, lowering his head. What is good? Will wonders. He doesn't hear the doctors voice as he instructs him, and instead lowers his buttocks on the table and places his feet into the rubbery stirrups. The insertion of the small ultrasound instrument into his canal is unsettling, and it sends a nauseated shiver throughout his body. He moans out in discomfort.

"I'm sorry. It can be a bit uncomfortable, at first. Just give it a few seconds and take a deep breath. Try to relax," the doctor instructs in a rehearsed and robotic voice.

"Uh huh."

“We don’t bother with the tests anymore… They take too much time. The ultrasounds are quicker,” the doctor informs him. “I’m just trying to find—ah, there it is. Congratulations. Would you like to inform your family, or shall I?”

Will doesn’t know what to say and doesn’t really think. He knows the words come out of his mouth involuntarily as if he’d predetermined them. “I suppose I will.”

“Very good. I’ll give you a moment to get dressed.”

The doctor leaves the screenshot on the monitor as he leaves, so that as Will dresses himself in the repugnant red clothing, he catches a glimpse of the smallest indication—almost like a bean. It catches him off guard, taking his breath away. He stares into the monitor, his heart dropping to his stomach. Despite its strangeness in black and white, despite the fact that it doesn’t look human, he can already see the child in it. The likeness of Hannibal with tinges of him.

He hates the doctor for leaving it on the screen. He detests the feeling that it brings out of him, like a kind of food poisoning, spewing out. He sits down, in the chair, arms on the armrests. “Why, Hannibal?” he asks out loud, only for the four grey walls to hear.

Even so, he wishes Hannibal were here to respond.

****

Bedelia waits for Will’s arrival in the foyer, pacing back and forth in anticipation. She hopes, for him but mostly for herself, that he arrives with good news. Hannibal hadn’t been here for this month’s Ceremony, breaking rules—but it had to be this way because of Ofjack. The countless meetings and travel throughout Gilead Hannibal’s had to endure in order to convene with the other Commanders… It makes Bedelia rueful, as if he himself is leaving her without a child. As if he is the cause of her emptiness.

When to door opens, Will coming in red in the face and on the brink of tears, she tells herself it’s because he’s happy—and that could mean only one thing. “Good results?” she chimes, eyebrows raised.

“Uh, yes. Congratulations,” he mutters, feeling the room spin. “Is the commander home?” he asks.

“Not yet, no. He should return in a few days. I’ll tell him then. I am so very proud of you,” she tells him, stepping forward. He’s pregnant—no more ceremonies. No more torment.

Will turns away, looking at the shoe rack, at the polished leather shoes Hannibal left on it—the ones he wore so many months ago at their last dinner together. Will remembers the sound of them against the wooden parquet, soft warm taps that filled him with anticipation.

“I don’t—” Will squeaks out, slipping down the door, his knees weak.

“No, no, no,” he hears Bedelia shout as the home in front of him blurs into a murky black.

****

Will wakes to the sight of Hannibal leaning over him, his soft lips slightly parted. Hannibal breathes slowly, placing a cold and wet towel on his forehead. “Hanni,” Will whispers.

“Commander Lecter,” Hannibal reminds him flatly.

Will turns the other way, seeing Bedelia sitting in a chair on the other side of the room with her arms crossed. “It’s alright, he’s obviously not feeling well.”

“The baby is fine,” Hannibal informs. “No signs of miscarriage. The doctor said you fainted from exhaustion. He left a few moments ago.”

“Thank you,” Will responds, looking away from Hannibal. He can’t bare to see him now, to look into those eyes. He’s afraid of what he might find there.

“You should sleep better,” Bedelia breathes, her voice jagged.

“It’s insomnia,” Hannibal adds, “Perhaps a bit more activity would tire you out, and it would be good for the baby.”

Will nods, filtering out the remainder of advice. Bedelia leaves first, allowing Hannibal to finish with Will. She looks over her shoulder as she leaves the room, throwing a glance at Hannibal, before walking away. They listen to the sound of her footsteps as she walks down the staircase, waiting for her to reach the bottom of it before they speak.

Hannibal places his hand over Will’s abdomen, stroking it with his thumb. “Are you feeling alright, my love?”

Will turns onto his side with a sigh, forcefully closing his eyes. “I’m fine,” he mutters into his pillow.

“I had to leave you in silence. We’re coming up with procedures to keep the Handmaids from escaping. The meetings are taking a toll. I don’t want you to see me, at night, when I finally let myself—”

“Then all you’re showing me is a side of you, and perhaps that’s a lie too,” Will counters. “I’d like for you to leave.”

“See me tonight, please. I’ll come and unlock your door at night. Come down an hour later. I’ll tell you then. Everything.”

“I don’t know, Hannibal. I can’t wait forever. I’m rotting in this room. You won’t want me when I’ve spoiled.”

“You could never.” Hannibal pulls his hand away from Will, setting it in his own lap. “You’ve given us the greatest gift.”

“It’s yours and Bedelia’s.”

“We’ll talk tonight. Please come.”

Hannibal stands from his chair slowly, waiting to see if Will would turn around. When he doesn’t, Hannibal walks away from the room, closing the door behind him. Will sits up from bed, staring at the closed door, wishing he could call for Hannibal to come back.

****

Will finds himself in Hannibal’s office once more, Hannibal sitting at his desk. He’d left the door unlocked, should Will choose to come. He’s writing, his full attention on the paper in front of him. With a few more scrawls, he finishes, looking up at Will with a smile.

“Come here,” he motions, tapping his lap.

“No,” Will protests.

Hannibal cocks his head, pressing his lips together. Will reluctantly approaches, inspecting Hannibal’s lap for spikes or whatever else could hurt him—though he’d prefer physical pain to the closeness that would plant a festering seed of loneliness inside him once he leaves.

“You once told me you preferred sins of omission,” Hannibal whispers into Will’s ear.

“I learned that I prefer the truth.”

“The truth is a tricky thing. It’s neither gentle nor nice. It comes with fangs and bites. Would you like it to bite you, Will?”

“I’d rather be bitten now than die in anticipation of a bite.”

“We have Freddie Lounds,” Hannibal admits. “She admitted to conspiring with you and several other handmaids.”

“What are they doing to her?”

“I don’t know. It’s above my rank. But I fear they’ll do something similar as in other provinces—maim or... She’s still valuable, to the Commanders, because she is fertile.”

“They’ll cut her tongue out,” Will concludes, shaking in Hannibal’s arms. He can see it now, the threat of the pendulum’s swing behind his eyes. He had chosen to suppress it for so long, forced himself to live in dullness. All he hears now is Freddie’s screams and the rush of anesthesia through his veins, a heaviness falling over him. “To get her to shut the fuck up,” he finishes, opening his eyes.

“You can no longer keep the associations away.”

“No.”

“What would you have me do?” Hannibal asks, placing his hands around Will’s abdomen.

“I would have you take the commander’s tongue who submits this idea. I’d have you castrate the lot of them. Would you do it, for me? Hannibal?”

“Anything,” Hannibal utters, pressing his lips against Will’s.

“Then do it,” Will rasps, biting down on Hannibal’s lower lip.

“They wanted to take you away from me,” Hannibal admits as he pulls away, his eyes watering. “I’ve been arguing that you might be pregnant. And now that you are.”

“They won’t take me. But what do I have here, growing fat with a child that is not truly ours?”

“It belongs to us.”

“Only in our dreams.”

“I promise, Will. Whatever I have to do, I will. Give me time.”

“Your promises are bounded by time.”

“I know.” Hannibal pulls Will into his chest, gripping him tightly.

Mouth of the beast

Chapter Summary

Hannibal has a surprise for Will, though Will has doubts as to whether it'll be a good one.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s still too early for Will to show, he thinks, though this morning he feels distinctly bloated when he wakes up. He rushes to the bathroom and stops in front of the mirror. Taking a deep breath, he looks at the curve of his stomach, a barely-there belly bulge that frightens and delights him at the same time. A perfect mixture of him and Hannibal is growing within him, the size of a nut perhaps or even smaller. The moment is cut short by a bout of nausea sending him to the toilet.

Bedelia comes this morning to assist him instead of Martha. It’s unusual how she conducts herself, timid and with a half-smile as she helps him dress. He realizes in those cloudy eyes of hers lies a need for control over the pregnancy. She cannot carry a child, no, but she can make sure to the best of her ability that Will brings a healthy child to term.

“Martha’s prepared a special breakfast for you,” she tells him, her voice soft and breathy. “We’ve managed to get a pineapple, and it’s all yours.”

Will nods gratefully, gulping as he watches her fingers lace up the front of his winged hat. “I’m doing well, Mrs. Lecter.” *Mrs. Lecter*, a phrase he tries to avoid. His tongue nearly goes numb at the feel of it forming in his mouth, the pinprick of a nearly allergic reaction to the concept.

“I’m glad.”

They try their best to exchange as few words as possible, though Will wants to ask her how she must feel to know she’ll one day be taking a child that isn’t hers. He doesn’t want to hurt her, that isn’t his intention. He wants to make her see the insanity of it all, the madness festering in her mind. The madness that’s been placed there by some patriarchal group whose interest will never be her interest. There must be some small remainder of Bedelia, the one he had known, who could fight through this delusion. But she’s already convinced herself that the baby is hers, told herself over and over whenever she goes to sleep —Will can see it on her face. The half hope that by the end of the pregnancy and upon the child’s delivery, she would find a sandy haired baby staring back at her. Pray not for wild brown curls.

****

It's well past midnight when there's a knock at his door, waking him up. He stirs in his bed, groaning, before getting up slowly, listening carefully for if there would be another knock. And surely it does come, a bit stronger this time though not too loud. Will tiptoes to the door, knocking back. He thinks it's Hannibal, though he isn't sure. He can't risk it.

"I was asleep," he breathes into the door.

"Can I come in?" Hannibal's voice greets him on the other end.

"Yes. Slowly, the door creeks."

Hannibal unlocks the door, entering the room with a box in his hands. He sets it down on Will's bed, turning to him with a hint of a smile on his lips. "Well?"

"I had a pineapple today, and now this. I must be the luckiest man in the world." Will isn't sure where the bitterness comes from, or why it hurts him to receive a gift from Hannibal. He doesn't want a gift, all the same.

"Indulge me, darling."

Will nods slowly, tugging at the edge of the perfectly tied red bow. It unravels smoothly, the box collapsing open to reveal a suit. It's dark emerald in color, and the material is soft to touch. "You must be insane."

"Tonight, isn't the night for your red habit," Hannibal breathes, wrapping his arms around Will. "I need to take you somewhere. I think you'll be pleased. Get dressed, indulge me."

"At least we're doing this now, while a suit would still fit," Will mutters under his breath, taking the package with him to the bathroom. "I'll need a bit."

Hannibal nods, "Meet me at the bottom of the staircase in half an hour. You're not the only one who needs to get ready."

Hannibal is giddy, an odd look on the sharp angles of his face. Will isn't sure what's caused the excitement in him, but an unease bubbles up in his stomach. There is no pure good, not nowadays. Will reminds himself of this before daring to hope.

"I'll meet you in half an hour," Will echoes.

****

Will does not expect the Bentley to be parked outside of the home. Hannibal is one to show off, but even this is too much for him. He is not Bedelia, after all. He had hoped for something more discrete. He pulls at his suit jacket, straightening it. He'd hoped it would fit like a glove, with Hannibal's impeccable eyes, he'd assumed Hannibal would find the perfect fit for him. It's the bloating, Will tells himself, not yet a bump, that makes the midsection slightly too tight.

Inside of car, the driver is silent and polite. Will notices how he tightens the grip on the steering wheel each time their eyes meet. Hannibal takes his gaze away from the driver, "Matthew won't be a problem," he assures Will.

"I have no doubt."

Will places his arms over his midsection, hiding. Hannibal pulls his arms apart, placing his hand over the barest curve, a curve only he and Will would notice. A smile spreads across his lips, wide and genuine. The tears prickling his eyes threaten to spill onto his cheeks, but he doesn't allow them to. "You look ravishing, my love."

"I'm bloated, pale, sweaty…" Will begins.

Hannibal silences him with a kiss, brief but loving. "You are perhaps the most breathtaking creature I've ever seen, Will Graham."

"The bump will probably go away tomorrow, it's just bloat," Will protests as Hannibal continues stroking Will's stomach.

"You're nearly thirteen weeks pregnant, Will. You're bound to be showing," Hannibal reminds him. "Are you afraid?"

"A bump would mean it's real," Will admits hesitantly, placing his hand over Hannibal's.

"It was real before the bump." Hannibal lays down in Will's lap in the back seat of the car, facing Will's stomach, whispering to it. "And it is real now. Delightfully, beautifully real."

Will's startled by the sight; breath hitched. Hannibal speaks in Italian, hushed tones and in what Will assumes to be words of adoration and hope. It's almost easy to forget the darkness within Hannibal, seeing him like this, forts taken down. It's easier to forget their past and Hannibal's hobby, with his head placed in Will's lap. He doesn't seem like a predatory creature. He seems like a father. In the silence of the drive, Will feels as if this is all that has ever existed, the three of them, hovering in space with no external forces surrounding them.

****

The hotel room is spacious, clean. The air smells floral, almost. Will smiles at Hannibal questioningly, in awe. Hannibal puts his hands up, defending himself.

"We'll come back here later, tonight. But first, I need to take you downstairs."

Will doesn't question Hannibal, though he feels like he should. There's a mischievous spark in his eyes that tells Will there is something more to this trip than a night alone, a night with Hannibal in bed where he doesn't have to tremble in fear at every creak of the home. He hastily follows Hannibal to the elevator who inserts a key into the panel, turning it left, and choosing a restricted floor. Hannibal hugs Will close to him, burying his nose in Will's hair.

“It’ll be alright,” Hannibal assures him. Before the elevator doors open, Will can hear music. The smell of cigars hits his nose, smoke entering the elevator as the doors open wide. It becomes quickly apparent that Hannibal has taken him to some kind of underground brothel. A panic wells up inside of Will, thick and nagging.

“I wouldn’t imagine you going to this kind of place,” Will comments, stepping out of the elevator.

“I don’t. But we’ll have to act a bit. Follow my lead,” Hannibal smiles at Will one last time before his face returns to a calm stillness.

There are women scattered throughout the room, some sitting in the laps of patrons, other leaning against the bar with cigarettes in hand, and still others waiting with doe eyes, pleading—*use me*. There are few of the last kind. Many more play pretend—*I’ll be the woman of your dreams tonight*—their eyes say. Will is tight-lipped, following Hannibal closely. A commander with an unfamiliar face greets Hannibal, hugging him like a bear, before parting with a pat of the shoulder.

“And who’s this?” he asks, his voice booming. From his sway, Will knows that he’s drunk.

“Not one of the ones here,” Hannibal responds coldly. “Will,” Hannibal calls to him.

“There are so few males,” he laments, “What a shame.”

Hannibal wraps him arm around Will’s shoulder, “Why don’t you sit down at Commander Rostropovich’s table, right there across the room.” Hannibal pauses looking at Rostropovich, “I’m sure your girl’s there to keep him company?”

“Of course. They’ll get to chatting.” His smile is crude, toothy. Will wonders if those fangs could bite.

“I’ll collect you in a few minutes, Will.”

Will nods, moving away from Hannibal and making his way to the table. He pushes passed the crowd, the music loud, the smell of sweat and sex in the air. His head pounds overwhelmed from the sensory stimulation. He doesn’t want to be here, but he couldn’t tell Hannibal that.

A stray red curl enters Will’s vision, prompting a kind of childish hope within him. *No, it can’t be*. The woman turns, face listless at first before a dopey smile spreads across her face. Will knows she’s high, out of her mind right now. But it is her.

“Freddie,” Will breathes, his voice breaking.

“Will Graham, what a pleasure it is to see you,” Freddie intones, standing from the table. “Did you come just to see little old me?”

“They captured you,” Will bites back.

There's something in his voice, an animalistic lividness that snaps Freddie out of the haze she finds herself in. "We can't talk about that here," she hisses. "Come, sit." She pats the red seat next to her. "Care for a drink? You won't find another one outside of these walls."

"I'm not drinking," Will sighs.

"Tsk, tsk, what a lucky ducky you must be…" Her lips curl into a smile around the rim of the glass.

"I couldn't come," Will tells her then, not regret but something other building up inside of him. "I couldn't get away."

"The past is the past, isn't it? If you can sit at the same table with me now and not show your claws, well then?"

Will pauses, observing her. The crop top is loose on her—she's lost weight since he'd last seen her. The skirt is short, purposefully so. She doesn't seem unhappy, but it's hard to tell with the drugs muddling up her brain.

"Are you happy?" he finds himself asking her.

"I can read, write, whatever I please. I can't publish, which is a shame… But this is the closest I can reach freedom. It's not so bad. I would have recommended it to you, if I knew this was an option."

She finds a glint in his eyes that she finds telling. It amuses her, the look on his face upon the suggestion. There's an implication in there, in her words—he would have to leave Commander Lecter. She realizes that when she asked Will to run off that day, he had no intention of running. Will Graham was tethered to the life of a handmaid by an invisible chain, one he could rip from his ankle but chooses not to. He's a prisoner to something so basic, almost pitiable.

"You're in love," Freddie notes, lighting a cigarette. "Is it him?"

Will grinds his teeth, urging himself to not shout. He doesn't want to cause a scene.

"I always thought you were like him," Freddie laughs to herself. "It was speculation, I'll admit. But you were right, he was the Ripper, wasn't he? Before all of this? But you aren't like him, not really. You're in love with him. You were then, too. It's why you got so close to the mouth of the beast."

"Please, don't Freddie."

"And you're pregnant with his child," she concludes. "Maybe you see the appeal now, of putting a wife's head on a plate and calling it a meal."

Will stands from the table then, ready to leave. In the corner of his eye he sees Hannibal coming towards him, Rostropovich by his side. "I'll be leaving soon," Will sighs, "It was nice talking to you, Freddie."

“He doesn’t love you back,” Freddie seethes. “How could he, the way he is?”

It’s the last words he hears before the pair comes, the remainder of the night a blur until they reach the elevator. It’s the hormones, Will tells himself, that’s making him cry in the elevator as it flies up to the upper floors. Hannibal scoops Will into his arms, stroking his hair. They both hope no will come onto the elevator, and no one does.

Chapter End Notes

More Matthew Brown in the next chapter!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!